

Creel



An anthology of creative writing

# Creel

# 2

Introduced by  
Matthew  
De Abaitua

Selected by  
Adrian May  
Chris McCully  
Philip Terry

Edited by  
Elaine Ewart  
Penny Simpson  
Marieke Sjerps

Wivenbooks



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Selected by

*Adrian May, Chris McCully  
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Edited by

*Elaine Ewart, Penny Simpson  
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With an introduction by

*Matthew De Abaitua*

University of Essex: Centre for Creative Writing

Wivenbooks

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## Foreword

Becoming a writer requires that you keep a promise that you have made to yourself. One way to hold yourself to that promise is to make it in the company of others.

Writing is not solely an act of individual heroism. It requires a support structure. Look at the list of acknowledgements in any book if you doubt me and count up the names of family members, agents, lovers, barmen. Experienced writers keep their own counsel, this is true. But a community is required at the early stage of a writer's development. A community of influences, attentive readers and rivals. The quarrels of the cafés and the slanders of the salons, to quote William Gass. A community that accepts your promise that you are a writer.

Studying Creative Writing at Essex is a way of making a promise to yourself that you will become a writer. I used to think that being a writer was solely a matter of publication. Get a book out there, and your promise is fulfilled. Simple as that. But it's not. You cannot divide the writers from the non-writers according to the utilitarian requirements of a publishing industry.

Through my contact with the students and teaching staff at Essex, on a course that embraces the experimental, the marginal, the mythological, I've come to regard writing as an act that goes beyond the products of the marketplace; it is a way of seeing and being. A mode of heightened attentiveness to language, to other people and to the self. If this is my faith, then publishing is its Church - it organises and administrates the religion but at times its concerns are parochial and even inimical to the faith which sustains it.

Today, publishers struggle to find the time to develop their writers, nor do they cultivate the social community which sustains them. Creative Writing courses and publications like Creel now provide that vital support group. Ten years elapsed from the completion of my MA to the publication of my first novel; I was sustained across that decade by the promise I had made to myself and to the community of writers I met as a postgraduate. If I had never made that promise in the company of others, I would have given up.

Sure, it was - in my case - a young man's promise born of rivalry, narcissism, egotism. No-one ever said writers are nice. We are ambitious and our depth of feeling is matched with a cold measurement of how best to utilise that feeling in our work. It seems strange to suggest a support group could be made out of such material. But it is support of a specific and vital type: helping each of us to vastly improve our writing. This is a project without end and that is what is glorious about it.

What each of the writers have achieved in the following pages is a milestone in their work, making a lasting mark within the Essex community of writers and readers and taking vital steps toward keeping their promise.

## *Matthew De Abaitua*

*Matthew De Abaitua's new science-fiction novel is called 'The Destructives' (Angry Robot, 2016) and is published in the UK and the US.*







# Baba Yaga laughs velvet and claw sharp at Miss Grey

*Carole Webster*

When she is left alone  
In this brick house  
At twilight

She laces her bat soft boots and  
Opens the back door  
To the dark garden,

She pulls the black woollen shawl  
Embroidered with cherub pink roses  
Over her head and she is altered a little.

The unseen blackbird calls  
A penny warning, a sound of  
Coins against keys in the apple tree,

Miss Grey the slim tabby  
From next door outstares her with amber and is  
Surprised by golden tiger eyes;

She laughs velvet and claw sharp  
Miss Grey blinks once and  
Slinks hurriedly through the clematis hedge.

Insinuating between each dark leaf across the long wet grass  
She mouse steps  
Running in bat soft boots.

Beyond the black painted shed  
The Cornishman's chickens  
Settle their feathers and their speckled hen voices,

Their creaky crooning spells  
A hex on dark, the moon, the fox to  
Bind a blue silver April day.

She smiles into the corner of her mouth  
Wearing bat soft boots and a black woollen shawl  
In the black painted hut with yellow hen's feet,

This is what happens  
When she is left alone  
In this brick house at twilight.

*4th December, 2013*

# True

## *Gabriela Silva Rivero*

I.

*why did you turn back,  
that hell should be reinhabited  
of myself thus  
swept into nothingness?*

*Hilda Doolittle, Eurydice*

He's come – he loves me! Oh, I did well to never doubt him. He loves me, he loves me; if there was ever need for proof then his presence here, beyond that hateful river, beyond that thrice-awful hound, is that proof.

And seeing him, with these eyes I thought would see no more but the dead, in seeing him come all the memories I thought lost to oblivion. I remember: sitting under the shadow of the trees, with sunlight falling on the ground in splotches, and the wind moving the grass in soft waves, I remember the earth under me breathing like a wild animal caught napping. I remember looking at the river, and how my lover's fingers would dance on the string like rays of light on the water and his songs would grow like eddies in the stream, touching others, touching me. I remember how he kissed me and said that of all his songs I was the truest, the first, and I remember the flash of red opening the green, the bite of the serpent that sent me here. Colours of all hues, made all the more brilliant now that I spend my time, if what the souls experience here is time, amidst the darkest of blacks and the palest of whites.

I am shapeless now, given form only by the cloth of the dead, so thick, so heavy I can barely walk, can barely hear anything that isn't dead. I am in the hall of the king and the queen, he has performed for them a song of loss, and the queen is wiping her eyes. She understands what it is to lose the sun on the meadows and inhabit instead the darkness where things come to die, what it is to exchange the sound of water and music for the dripping of dead salts upon ash. She says something that escaped my ears – I supposed they serve only the spirits now – but it does not matter: I know she will let me go.

But the king's voice does reach me, he who is both dead and more alive than any. He lays down rules: life is always conditioned to something, and mine is to sight and to sunlight. "Walk forward, never stop, never look back," the king says, until the sunlight warms the two of us as a couple again. Each step will cinch new flesh around my bones, but only the light of the sun and the blowing of the wind will make the body come alive.

I already feel my heart begin to beat! Is it a mirage alone, this fluttering like holding a butterfly in my hands? I walk behind my lover, would that I could embrace him, take his hand and twine his string-scraped fingers with mine. He would be so warm where I am so cold... patient, Eurydice, patient. You were patient once before, waiting for him to play, for his inspiration to visit. You pushed away bitter thoughts and jealousy, when evil tongues whispered that he had other lovers, that he loved his music more than he loved you, you closed your ears.

This is your reward: that he loves you, that he is come to take you home. And I see the mouth of the cavern, it gapes whiter than souls, makes the tunnel so dark it seems inexistent. Is that not what it will be, soon, when I am free and my heart is loving again and death becomes but a nightmare remote, both past and future? Ever so strongly beats my heart, I feel it pulsing in the tips of my fingers, I feel the stone under the soles of my feet, the mantle around me becomes light, becomes thin. My eyes begin to open ever more to the life and the colours ahead.

Then Orpheus stops.

He stops, for a long time he stops and stays quiet.

I know him, I love him. He is looking at the light ahead, at how it kisses the entrance of the tunnel and entices forth purple flowers standing on robust green stalks. Like the first flowers to break through the snow in spring, these flower at the gate between life and death, and in his head Orpheus composes.

For how long? Time, which has started to move under my feet along the rocks and moss of the tunnel, evaporates around him like steam around a cauldron, like an aura. Orpheus doesn't move.

And then he turns around.

I cry – but I don't, because my nascent lungs and vocal chords last not enough to produce any sound. His eyes meet mine and in that instant mine fail, and I see only red, my blood that had pumped from my heart and that now falls and stains the purple lilies. Orpheus! He loved didn't love me loved me enough to journey into Hades and not enough to look away! If there was ever need for proof then his eyes on mine, so close to life, so close to humanity, are that proof.

Orpheus! I want to call, to insult him, to remind him forever that he has banished me away from colour and light. To tell him that all along I knew that of all of his songs I was never the truest, never the first, and that I see, not with the eyes that rot inside my skull but with these true eyes of the dead, that my life would deprive him of his talent while my death will bring it forth.

And I resent him for it! That he lives, that he thrives off my corpse while I drink from the Lethe and forget and am forgotten, even as I love him like the shadows love the sun. Only an instant, less than an instant, I see him and I love and I hate, and I call Orpheus, Orpheus...

## II.

*Bread nor milk on the table leave  
to entice the dead while you lie abed.  
Let Orpheus, magus, their spirits weave  
into all that may be seen, instead;*

*Rainer Maria Rilke, Sonnets to Orpheus*

I stop to re-gain my breath: I make no excuses, my office is that of narrative, not that of the acts that narrative often describes. Different men are born for different occupations; let others kill each other in search of bravery, honour, and fame. I shall sing of it from a safe distance even if that means my body is rather weaker than the ideal. Weakness affords time for thought, I've found, and so I use it.

Not twenty paces away shines the light of the world of the living. I've been accused already of being a coward (wimp is the word they used, even "coward" is deemed too manly for me), for not falling on my sword to follow Eurydice. "If you miss her so much," they've said, "Go meet her in Hades!"

So I did. Literally, which perhaps will move me from wimp to coward, even to hero. Few have dared to come down here; men greater than me have called the dead up instead of walking into the shadows. But men greater than me had not my lyrics, my voice, my music. I am capable of finding beauty in the most terrible sights; I find ugliness beautiful in its existence! I am a poet, the one to hold light in front of humanity and illuminate its way as it walks towards the future! Narration is creation, and poets, demiurges! Look at me, now in Hades, in the land of the dead I bring life in the form of words. Even here I dare to stay my feet and wonder how to write about it! How I charmed Charon, serenaded Cerberus, pacified Persephone and Hades! How the underworld wasn't only black, but veined with red and purple – too simple, purple! Amaranthine, amethysts – too delicate! Pomegranate – yes, pomegranate for red, and it also has the connection to the Queen Persephone herself. Pomegranate and porphyry, I shall say, appropriately regal and evocative, to think of darkness punctuated by those elegant hues.

I forget myself, I care not that I'm standing in the exit to Hades but of how to bring others to its gates through my words. Words fall from my head to my tongue, this shall be my truest song. Like the pain of losing Eurydice, the song for Hades rose harsh through my throat and spilled forth. What was losing Eurydice? Rudderless, I was aimless, the sun would not warm me, water would not refresh!

And yet, standing before Hades and his queen, forth came my song, my true song, unconcerned with porphyry and pomegranates, just mourning and love. Just to remember it – my chest burns anew, and the unctuousness that had taken hold washes off with the pain. Eurydice! My muse, my

song! You gave me love in life, but music in death. Eurydice, forgive me! I cannot go on. I cannot face the sun with you next to me, I cannot face my incomplete self now that the pain has made me whole.

Eurydice! I turn around, I betray you but remain whole. Will you understand? In the moment our eyes meet, the instant I see the being I held dearest, I feel myself be forever new as you vanish into ashes. Eurydice! Your name will ring forever in my lips, and in my lips you live. You, who would have been lost in the tides of history, will live forever along with me, our story shall forever sing you, you, you.

### III.

*I am not certain I will  
keep this word: is earth  
"home" to Persephone? Is she at home, conceivably,  
in the bed of the god? Is she  
a born wanderer, in other words  
an existential replica of her own mother,  
less hamstrung by ideas of causality?*

*Louise Glück, Persephone the Wanderer*

He sings how he is, no longer one two less than one. I see his face his mind his soul he thinks he is sincere; he is whole though he is less than one. I am less than one. I am two. Persephone that stays here, Persephone that goes up. Up up there is mother down down there is what? He is husband rapist lover father death all because he is all. He sings. Orpheus and Eurydice have always made me cry. Here, Hades, I knew, I know, before he sings he sung I knew and I know she comes back.

Difficult, coming down and going up. She comes home: this is the last home, true home. Me, up is the true home, painful every time I cross, people burn bonfires make libations. Red on red blood on fire.

Eurydice is no wanderer. She returns she goes she comes back. Time is just a word and she is gone she is staying she is back. No one burns bonfires offers young pigeons for her, not even Orpheus. She knows home drinks oblivion rests surrounded by asphodel, waits, waits, waits. He will join her his name destroyed drunk Maenads torn apart, he will join her his mysteries will join her his song only will breathe, even as people doubt it will doubt it have always doubted it. And it gives birth to new poems, angry poems sad poems odes opera comic books archetypes feminist theory. His breath has more breath than he imagines, only human, not a wanderer.



IV.

*A soft light rising above the level meadow,  
behind the bed. He takes her in his arms.  
He wants to say I love you, nothing can hurt you*

*but he thinks  
this is a lie, so he says in the end  
you're dead, nothing can hurt you  
which seems to him  
a more promising beginning, more true.*

*Louise Glück, A Myth of Devotion*

Poets, like the gods, hope to leave their names behind. Blind to their own transience. Our transience. Not even gods the gods survive. All changes. All is renamed. He thinks he is whole. She thinks herself betrayed. Persephone longs for meadows, for narcissi blooming in spring. Orpheus longs for the cold granite of statues and his name engraved in stone.

But Hades has its due. Eurydice leaves; she comes back. Persephone leaves; she returns. I remain, as I change and am renamed, Hades, god and home. Death of Deaths, I have my due, I am true.

## Week Ten

### *Jeremy Solnick*

Go into the woods at night and things go a bit wonky, they de-familiarise, you lose control. It is the last full moon of the year. The moon is tugging everything out of shape. The sky is occluded by cloud all stars are obscured. A lode of silver marks the lunar path. Moonlight infuses the landscape resonating, drawing light out of things. Bushes, branches, pebbles glow Shapes blur beyond recognisable boundaries My shod foot slips, an over-familiar briar grips my sleeve. Moonlight, my good friend on the open path is now a treacherous fellow. Something fearsome waits around the corner. A crooked shadow flickers by the bench. It is my doppelgänger my moon-changed self, with slavering muzzle and lupine limbs. Silence. Fear gnaws at me There is wildness here, a power that dwells beyond the friendly. It slips through the cracks of stories. It hides under bushes, behind trees under bridges, in the corner of my eye. It vanishes when I look at it. I am afraid and fear goads wildness. I leave the woods and cross the walkway over the marsh. My footsteps thud on wet planks. There is slippery mud ahead I touch the button of my torch. Instantly the beam cauterises the world. Despatch darkness! Dazzling sunlight after days of cloud. Boxing day walkers churn the path into a mud-patch Thatchers tear great wounds in the reedbeds The solstice has passed. This hemisphere turns back from winter. Spring will come And come again. All wounds heal in time The landscape closes over us and knows us not

# Rime

*Ian Tucker*

*(Based on a true event of reading)*

She had watched the news reports with the same incredulity as everyone else, later running the footage back in her mind: the bedraggled figure that shuffled down the gangplank - the grey blanket drawn tightly around him like a protective cloak - as if that alone might protect him from... from further elemental persecution? Perhaps...

A mad prophet's cowl - yes, that's it. That was it.

\*\*\*

Then, for a short time, he had worn what appeared a nervous grin through the Crusoe beard, and the news crews had grinned back: they, at the thought of their story; he at the squinting sun, and this new perplexing sea of voices that waited for him excitedly at the quayside.

But she wondered about the blank look in his eyes, and thought about the rolling ocean that could be made out in the distance over his shoulder, beyond the harbor and the breakwaters - its depths, its dancing roving crests that seemed to clutch out at the sky. The rolling ocean, she thought - which he had so narrowly, so audaciously cheated.

She had watched, turned wide-eyed to her wide-eyed colleagues. Events from the outside world did not often impact them in their small isolated community. They were unaccustomed to the spectacle and fuss, which seemed only to occur in far off places. But now the cameras had turned to their own shores to record this bizarre event. All the world's commotion had reached them from beyond the hard blue wall of the horizon.

She shrugged, and got up to begin her shift.

\*\*\*

And the next day there he was again. Propped up this time amidst cotton pillows, their starched coolness an impossible dream. His bare arms hung limply at his sides, his bandaged hands resting upturned on his lap as if in supplication. This room felt familiar, he had been here a hundred times in films. The sunlight, filtered by the blinds, no longer threatened. The tube in his wrist nourished him with peace. The hum of the machine at his side modulated and subdued the awful washing rhythms in his head.

Discreetly, she peered around the door so as not to disturb his rest, noting the stable readings on the small screen beside him. She noted too the eyes, which had changed again, from that earlier blankness, to the choppy pleading incoherence of the evening before - the shock of a beginning realisation, eyes hung with a mosaic of burning cloud - to something now that she could not quite fathom.

\*\*\*

The bird the only stable pivot against the endlessly tilting floor of the sky where it met the sea.

He had needed fuel a beacon a means of making smoke. Thus he had put to fire, piece by piece, using an old galvanized tub for the purpose, the decking and superstructure of his tiny craft, so that towards the end the thing appeared to have been gnawed from above by some great beast. Torn to the very gunnels. The rib ends splintered and exposed.

The colour of the sea appalled him – this animal unfamiliar green, its phantom foaming races.

The heavy reel as it spun whirring through his hopelessly chafed and damaged hands became his one source of comfort, as he cast further and further out, the line, humming with life, the whipping wind, sang through the vigour of the catch just as before, as he labored night and day, aware of the fickle nature of shoals such as these, ankle deep in writhing mirrors.

That, and the relentless buffeted bird, fixed in space just above him, slightly to port, the plumage of its pristine breast poked at by prying invisible fingers. But immovable as stone at the centre of his spinning world.

He had not needed to cast so far off, but dared not drop the line down into the shadows beside the boat, into that dark rippling mackerel light, for fear of meeting the face of his companion staring up at him from beneath. And when those fears became too great he would busy himself with the scrap of paper that he kept pinned to the inside of his shirt.

Slowly, however, as his broken fingers had succumbed, become useless, he could do little more than scabble around in the bilges, to scoop up and attempt to gut the remains of the previous bounty, and then to smoke it somehow, above the smoldering dismembered painted timbers that somehow he had managed to keep alight.

\*\*\*

He had clung to her arm and spoken in a soft Spanish - they had agreed that it was Spanish - a language she did not anyway understand. His grip, his agitated state, belied the flow of words that rose and fell gently and uninterrupted from his mouth, his breath sweet with salt. These were not imploring demands, or frantic questions, but rather gave the impression of a quietly though insistently recounted tale whose telling had begun long before the appropriate cue, and to her ears, this unknown tongue took on the sound of an extended chant, a mantra - for although she could not make out the meaning, she was aware of the manner in which he would pause and continue, pause and continue - the formation of a pattern, rendered without thought, without reflection.

A teacher from the local primary school was called for. Along with French, she gave some instruction in elementary Spanish, but when she arrived, all aflutter, pulled from her afternoon lesson, she was unable to decipher much of what he said; indeed, felt herself a little at sea without her recent wedding tweeds, which such an occasion with cameras surely warranted, and would have neatly defined for them her small sparrow-like frame.

A fisherman, he was a fisherman, little else. With her help they asked him to write his name, his address, next of kin. But he looked at them blankly. Probably illiterate, they had decided. A simple fisherman.

\*\*\*

It was afterwards, when the teacher and the reporters had left, that he had pressed the note into her hand, and later during her break she had unfolded the small slip of paper and sat quietly mouthing to herself the incomprehensible syllables:

Nos bordean las regiones inmensas de la muerte en vida - el océano, el desierto. Sabemos que de vida ocultada rebosan, pero a menos de que uno sea el elegido, el nómada iniciado, no rebosan para nosotros.

Compared to the torrent of words that had flowed from his mouth, this dry slip of paper with its few scribbled phrases felt incongruous, misplaced somehow. A colleague, overhearing her strange incantation, came over to see what she was reading:

Nos bord e-an las re Hee-on-es  
in-men-sas de la mu-er-te en vi-da  
- el os-e-ano, el des-i-er-to.

Sab-e-mos kay day vi-da oc-ul-ta-da re-bos-an,  
day vi-da oc-ul-ta-da re-bos-an, (he turned this phrase over again slowly in his mouth)

pero a men-os day kay u-no say-a  
el el-e-Hee-do, el no-ma-do in-is-i-a-do  
no re-bos-an para nos-o-tros...

A former student of the sparrow, he made a better job of the pronunciation, softening and extending the vowels as he remembered, breaking open the diphthongs – but corrugating the ‘g’s’ to become gurgling peninsular ‘h’s’, instead of the gentler ‘j’s’ of the castaway. As for the meaning, however, he could spread little light. Something about life and death, he said, oceans, a desert perhaps. A love note, a poem? Nothing urgent, or that can help anything, at least. He gave it to you. I’d keep it.

He had left after the third class, he explained, but could see now how the constant drilling - the sounds, the syllables – had helped, had sunk in. But anyway he had left, impatient for meanings – yes, that was it: definitions, that’s what he had really wanted.

\*\*\*

On the second day he awoke to the sound of a voice that he knew to be [could only be] his own, needle-pale and fluffed with static, [coming he suspected] from a radio in a distant ward. In his dreams [He imagined that] he had heard a name that resembled his [own] but supposed that this could not be the case.

He stared out into the room, its whiteness an immensity of space, and a silence falling upon him suddenly like a great wave that had begun as a mere murmur in another distant ocean how many thousands of miles from here.

When she next looked in she found the bed carefully made. The oscilloscope flickered like an old projector might, emitting the plaintive ribboning trail of an already distant, receding figure; an angular stick-man with faintly clicking toe-pinched steps. And already she had the words from the note imprinted on her memory. The evening before she had toiled to translate them, had finally managed to isolate the verbs, establish the tone, settled on a version which she could believe in, was almost there, as she pictured her own hand, its looping tracery gently unraveling the already fading scrawl beneath: We are bordered by vast regions of living death, she wrote, the ocean, the desert. We know that they [teem] with hidden life, but unless we are the chosen, initiated nomad, they do not [teem] for us.

She saw herself then, standing there, the room, its narrow cell-like confines. She braced herself, for the great thunder, the green familiar impacting mass. As constant, as unyielding, as stone.

\* \* \*

Somewhere, before, in the midst of all this, an image had come to her: Look at me, he said, I'm all in (he sat slumped on an exposed transom that he now used as a bench, head down, addressing the heaving floor of the boat). I am torn, I am clutter-worn. And as he said these words he somehow sensed, just above him, slightly to port, the dark eye of the great bird soften.

# Rejected

*Ben Shillito*

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this page was not originally left blank, but the words got lost on the way to the printer's, and there was not enough time to put new ones in

this page unintentionally left-wing

this page was just a mistake from the get-go

it is inappropriate to write a story in which literary theorists  
are explicitly presented as sexually-motivated grave robbers  
for one thing, necrophiliacs have morals

2,387 words removed

# The Geniza of Dunwich

*Jeremy Solnick*

The stone house is near the marketplace  
Thick walls fortify it against arson  
Far below the house is a vaulted cellar

The chest is built of larch planks  
Caulked to resist fire and flood  
Oak-ribbed, lead-lined

Eye of my eyes, ear of my ears  
How will I live in this world without you?

He passes each volume to his friend  
Who packs it tenderly into the chest  
Volumes passed from father to son

Debates of scholars in Pumbedita  
Wisdom from the desert of Moab  
Poems from the orchards of Andalusia

Frontlets of my mind, pilots of my soul  
How will I navigate the shoals of night without you?

The Two men place the chest  
Into the Geniza at one end of the cellar  
Then the door is bricked and rendered

Light of my heart, All that I am lies hidden here  
I am not whole until we are re-united

The King's decree is sealed  
In one month the people  
Must depart from the land

# Baba Yaga laughs leather and beak hard

*Carole Webster*

Baba Yaga sits at the blue sky top  
Of the wild bird cherry and  
She fast rides the sharp March wind

The grey-pink blossom  
Is 1920s teacup frail against  
The stark cast iron cherry bark

She is watching Miss Grey  
The slim tabby from next door  
Make cruel mischief with the garden birds

Miss Grey sharp mouths  
Warm soft votives  
On a cold tiled floor

A pair of bodiless robin's legs  
Like minute cutlery poised to  
consume a sparrow's snipped off head

Baba Yaga laughs  
Leather and beak hard and  
There is a close rush of crow's wings

The next time I meet her for a cup of tea  
She wears silver wire at her throat  
Threaded with grey nylon claws and china cat's teeth.

*10th March, 2014*

# Dry

## *Marieke Sjerps*

THE LOG OF CAPTAIN CHAUNCEY DARLING OF THE CHARON

DEPARTED NY KØBENHAVN JAN 5TH 2265

It's cold below deck. With the kind of drafts we get down here, I wonder that we don't get more leaks. Having said that, there's always a good two inches of bilge water sloshing around. Plus, usually, a bloated rat and a crust of used chewing tobacco. It's like scummy old tea.

'I guess that's the last of the salt beef,' I say.

Lorelei wrinkles her nose at the green fuzz over our last barrel of meat. 'Maybe we could...'

I slam the lid back on. 'No, Lore. No zombie jerky for you. Moving on.' I smile at her to say it's okay, but my face is very stiff and it feels weird, so it probably looks weird.

It could be worse. Most of a barrel of hard tack, five jars of pickled cabbage, half a cask of salt fish and three large bottles of rum, minus however many stolen sips from Gio, the cook.

'That's a week or two left at least,' I say.

'Until what? Hunger pangs? Death by starvation? Cannibalism?'

'I wouldn't worry. You look better than you taste.'

'You're not funny, you know.'

'I know.'

We slip into a companionable silence as I jot down our findings. It's a log of ever-decreasing odds. When we set out from New Copenhagen, this hold was crammed to the rafters and polished to a high sheen. I'm not usually like this. I'm usually in control. People listen to me. Right now, someone's speaking louder.

'I'm going up,' Lorelei says.

'Sure. Take care.'

'Aye, cap'n,' she says, grinning, and I know she's making fun of me, maybe saying I should've stuck to wrangling horses, but I don't care. I watch her walk away, then turn to our cargo. Six big crates full of Nilean cotton, all completely fucked. Water got into it during the first storm. The cotton expanded along with the wood, and it got knocked around in the hold. The crates are all cracked, one completely split open, and the goods are ruined, starting to go moldy. Along with everything else. Three days adrift since the second storm. I slip out my knife and cut open one of the bales, run my hand through the cotton. It's damp and cold and smells musty. The color has gone from pure white to mottled grey. No, pink. No, red. A lukewarm drop falls on my hand, glistening up at me.

'What the hell.' Another drop.

It's coming from the overhead. Something wet and reddish is seeping through the boards. I lick the back of my hand- it's foul, like putrid piss and blood, incredibly salty.

'Lorelei?' I don't remember running, only the fear. I go through doors as if they're made of air. The passageways are a flash of wood. 'Lore!' She's right there, coming at me. I don't really feel it when I fall, I just hear the thud.

'Chance!' She grabs me, pulls me to my feet. She's stronger than I thought. The front of my pants is soaked, and I think the blood is mine, but it's not. Lorelei kneels next to Morana, who's sprawled across the deck. She's lying in a pool of runny blood. I tripped over her. Her eyes are wide and bloodshot, pink streaks running down her cheeks. Her throat has been cut. Blood drizzles from it.

'Fuck.' I squat next to Lorelei, put an arm around her shoulders. With my free hand, I close Morana's eyes. They're wet.

'We have to do something, Chance.'

'Yeah.'

'It's picking us off.'

'You mean he.'

'I'm serious!' She shrugs off my arm. 'Look at her face, Chance. Look at her fingers.'

So I look. The skin seems loose on her face. The veins bulge, blue and swollen. Her fingers are puffy. 'You're right, it's odd.'

'Odd!' The word comes out with a fleck of spit. Lorelei calls me some kind of asshole in German, and leaves me alone with the body. That's three.

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I've given the order to remain in pairs at all times. It should afford us some safety against this madman. I say that, but I'm afraid that for one of us, the outcome will be very different.

No, why should I lie in my own log? I don't fear it. It's part of my strategy. We'll work in pairs, one of us keeping constant watch. And then, when the first one falls... then we'll see who this bastard is.

It feels good to write it down. The responsibility has been weighing on me. The poor sucker who's been paired up with the killer doesn't know I'm sacrificing them for the good of the group. If they knew - but then, none of them suspect each other. They're all convinced it's something from outside of the crew, something hidden, but how can that be? They feel safer knowing they'll face it together, when it comes. I feel safer too, but that's easy for me to say. I've paired myself up with Lorelei. Captain and first mate, alternating shifts, makes sense, right? Yeah. I won't leave her with anyone else - but I feel bad. If I wasn't the captain, and it wasn't for her, I'd gladly take the risk like the rest of them. I like my chances against any one of this bunch. Maybe when we know more, I'll get a shot.

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Well, that was another major fuck fest. We found Gio dead. Faysal is in my bed, soaked and blue-faced. Lorelei is looking after him. Zhou and Dalia are keeping watch on deck.

‘Dry,’ he moans. Lorelei offers him some brandy, but he shakes his heavy head. ‘No, no. The devil. It was dry. It grabbed Gio and pushed the wet into him. His neck swelled like a hose.’ He grabs Lorelei’s wrist with thick numb fingers. His eyes used to be beautiful, sharp and fine and dark. Now they’re bulging, seeping pink tears. ‘Watch the stinger. It’s sharp – fast.’ There is a bandage around Faysal’s throat where he was cut, but it’s drenched. He turns to me. ‘I saw it, captain. We heard a rustle. Gio went to check it out. I was right behind him, like you told us, but the door slammed in my face. It’s that quick. When I opened it, the creature was on top of him, pumping him full of water. It was deflating as I watched, going crinkly and dry. I shouldn’t have watched. It just wanted Gio. It came at me, with the sting!’ His teeth chatter so badly he can’t speak for a while. He takes some brandy from Lore. I use my handkerchief to dab some of the sweat off his brow. He manages to continue his tale, but his forehead feels squishy. ‘I ran back into the hold. I heard it behind me. It clattered. It came, but the hold is wet, and it hates the wet. So I sat there, in the water. It was so cold.’ He sinks into a shivering silence.

That’s how we found him, huddled below deck, sitting in the cold, dirty water, bleeding out. I’d dozed off for a few seconds and this is what happens. Lorelei will watch over him for now. We’ll alternate shifts throughout the night, have a meeting at dawn. Five down, four left.

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Six down. This is what remains of my crew: Lorelei, Dalia and me. Faysal couldn’t breathe. The fever took him. He raved like a madman before the end, devils and ghouls. Death must have been a release. I said a few words before we gave his body to the sea. After that, I took a watch on deck with Zhou while the women slept in my cabin. All quiet. Lorelei took my watch two hours before dawn and something killed Zhou. Or so she reports. She says she didn’t see it happen. I’m glad now that I didn’t sleep. My time was better spent talking to Dalia. I think we’re on the same page.

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I can tell from the look in Lorelei’s eyes that I’m not going to enjoy this conversation.

‘This is it,’ she says. She doesn’t sit down. Dalia and I are sitting where we have been for the last two hours, beside each other. ‘It was a nice idea to stay in pairs, but this thing is too fast. We can’t keep waiting.’ Her small hands ball into fists. ‘We have to stick together, and we have to find it.’ Our silence doesn’t slow her down. ‘I think we should start with the crew quarters, they’re nice and dry. Bring weapons and buckets. You heard Faysal. This thing is evil. I’d rather die than let it take me. And -’ She hesitates. ‘Chance, come on. Look what it did to us.’

'It's awful,' I agree. That really rattles her. 'But I haven't seen this "devil". No one in this room has. Don't you wonder why?'

She doesn't argue. She doesn't have the patience. 'What a dumb thing to say. Can we move on?'

'No.' Lore looks irritated when Dalia speaks up, which helps me. 'You'll stay here. The captain and I will -'

Lorelei laughs. She doesn't know this was my suggestion. 'You and Chance?'

Both of them look to me. 'Lorelei,' I say. She finally sits down. 'There's nothing on the ship except us. And Zhou -'

'No. Chance, you'd better stop -'

'Zhou died on your watch,' Dalia says. I wish she'd stay out of it, but maybe I don't have the strength to do it. 'You're the only one who believes in this monster.'

Lorelei is still looking at me. 'Chance, is this what you think?'

'Dalia was with me the whole time. You're the only one.'

She says: 'You have to trust me.'

I look at her and I'm not sure. There's something frank and hopeless in her eyes.

'Please,' she says. Her eyes are brown and I've always trusted her. Lorelei. I know her and this is crazy. The possibility that I've been wrong opens like an abyss. Not because it's simpler, or because I'm scared. It's because I love her, and she couldn't lie to me like this.

Dalia reaches across, puts her hand on Lorelei's arm, but she knocks it off.

'Don't touch me!' Lorelei says.

And just like that, the moment's gone. I've been blind. Lorelei's face contracts with despair. We get up equally quickly. 'Stay away!' she says. We've drawn our knives at the same time too. Still, I'd never use it on her, so I let her back out of the cabin. Her face is wet with tears, but mine is dry. What choice do I have?

Dalia is behind me. Lorelei edges past the broken mast, the wind lashing her hair across her face. Her arm is stretched taut and the blade quivers in her hand. 'I can't let you lock me up, Chance. I want to help you, but I can't.' With her free hand, she tugs a crucifix out of her bodice. 'It's coming for us. It's coming, but it can't stand the water.'

'Lorelei.' She's climbed onto the bulwark. 'Lore, come down.'

'I can't let it take me. I can't let it take my soul.' She looks at me, and her eyes are brown and she's going over. 'I'm sorry, Chance.' She takes a tiny step back and disappears with a splash.

I don't remember going after her. I remember being in the water, swimming through frazil ice to get to her. I remember her face in the distance, lips slightly parted, turning blue as she lies in the still water, just before she starts to sink. I don't remember being pulled back in by the rope around my waist. I remember waking up on deck without Lorelei, next to Dalia's bloated corpse.

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It's quiet. The last of my crew is lying beside me. The fluid is starting to run out of her. I get up and grab a hatchet. It's past time. I'm flooding the ship.

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Here it comes.

A dun leg creeps up through the open grate. It lies flat against the deck. It's a yard long. Then it lifts, the joint cracks, and it starts to bend. The claw at the tip scratches the wood. Another yard of leg. Another joint, and again it bends. It scrabbles for purchase on the slick boards. It sinks into the wood. It's got a good hold. The other five legs follow. The sting emerges, curved and glinting like steel. It's so long, I drop my knife. It brings its body up, shriveled like a raisin but plump, covered in fine golden hair. It may not know I'm on the quarterdeck, but it wants the high ground.

It rushes the stairs, claws clattering. I throw a bucketful of water over it. It shrieks, leaps back, dripping. It raises itself up on three hind legs. As it lifts, it exposes its head. It's blind. Its eyes aren't flat, they're concave. There's no moisture to them, no movement. No shine. Yet it stares at me as if it can see. The back shield lifts. Layers of wings are stored away underneath, like black tissue paper. The pale sunlight shines through them, picking out the dark veins. It retreats. Not to the grate and the watery darkness below, but to the main mast, as I'd hoped. It snags a claw into a sail and begins to climb, wings humming wildly. I run down. It leaves the sail trailing behind it in tatters as it climbs, six steely claws making their mark. One ribbon drifts towards me. I grab it, flick a match into life, light the sail. The rum ignites with a blue whoosh. My eyebrows fizzle as I stumble back. I can see it up there, high and dry in the crow's nest, scuttling back and forth, then clinging to the mast, climbing to the very top. My flag flutters against its body, red white and blue. And then – God bless it – it catches fire.

It starts at the wings. They flare up, phoenix-like, then crumple into shadow, into light. It tries to fight it, falls back to the crow's nest and tosses itself around in a panic, but it has no space and it's so dry. The flames grab its legs, wrap around its body like a cocoon. As it pops, I hear it cry out. The sound crashes against the deck, full of fear and confusion. A huge plume of flame shoots towards an iron sky.

It's just me on my ship, fire sinking into ice. It could be a beacon, drawing ships here, if anyone's there to see. But Lorelei believed there is a God in this world, and not only devils. So I pray it will be a lighthouse, steering souls away from destruction. If this log is found, let it show the world that I remained, to the last, your dutiful servant,

*Captain Chauncey Darling*

# The Great Storm of 1328

## *Jeremy Solnick*

That night the sea struck the land in a fury  
The way a tyrannical father strikes his child  
The waves rose up and crashed down  
Again and again. There was no end to it

Solid became fluid  
air filled with spume  
Boundaries vanished  
river and sea became one flesh with the swirling wind  
The land covered it spewed spittle

Moon  
hung in a raging sky - hid in billowing darkness  
In jagged light  
rain glinted like flung nails that ripped into earth

Things vanished – re-appeared  
Smearred, distorted, engorged  
An army of ghostly revenants  
Parading on an ancient battlefield

Moon  
Bent down - heaved a huge tide upriver  
Shingle ground down, river banks gave way  
Dunwich was surrounded on three sides by sea

Land writhed in a merciless handgrip  
Its outstretched arm twisted away  
A terrible wound appeared as sinews burst  
A huge spit of land was wrenched from its socket

The pain of the town was unendurable  
The sea its mother, its wet nurse, its benefactor  
Became a traitor, a murderer  
Never again to be trusted

# Lake Michigan

## *Oliver King*

We walk the wet sand, our presence alarming  
gulls. Disturbed they rise, barking, from the beach  
and the surf softly comes between our toes.  
You're gathering pieces of rounded glass-  
the 'a' is sharp in your mouth; my tongue rolls  
it to the back until, like a sucked sweet,  
it's less a vowel than a caveman's grunt, now.

Then, I used to walk the sand at Walton  
and find pebbles and plastic and sharks' teeth  
and, as a caveman, I would prize them.  
To my mind, lacking any provenance,  
they were magic and had appeared, like God,  
immediately out of nothing- there.

A yob- "yob", you say it like a Brit now-  
had just graduated from Wisconsin  
cum laude, lauding it over his peers.  
Before them on the beach, he chugged his beer,  
chanced his batting arm and tossed the bottle.  
Mightily he struck it with the very bat  
with which he'd scored his hundredth homer.

A beer bottle boxed in the final batch  
from a bygone brewery, erupting  
from the misted rim where his lips had sucked  
to the recycle mark upon the heel.  
Shattered, the splinters rained onto the Lake  
as bees fall, murdered by a snapping dog.

Buoyed up and across the water on waves  
excited by their starring role in fate-  
amongst the rusted discs of lager cans  
and the pale fish-pestered corpses of crabs-  
once-edged shards are smoothed by hubris, you guessed.  
Brought east to our feet they appeared- like God  
or like sharks' teeth- something other than glass.

# Anniversary

*Elaine Ewart*

Out of the window,  
Over the dale,  
Ballooning smoke,  
Dark against pale,  
Thickens and smarts.

The first year is worst.  
That's what they say:  
The wilderness bed;  
The featureless grey;  
The days that won't start.

Burning the heather,  
As the moors require,  
Each year breaks out  
The wound of fire  
In a different part.

# The White Dress

## *Heidi Bernhard-Bubb*

The two women in the waiting room were silent. The receptionist was stuck on the phone, listening patiently to someone on the other side and offering occasional murmurs of encouragement. From time to time, she looked up at the women and smiled as if to say, 'I do apologise, I'm stuck here talking to this person who is going on and on.'

At least, that's how Marjorie understood the smile. She smiled back – 'go on and do your job, we understand.' And then Marjorie offered an encouraging smile to Naomi, the younger woman beside her. But Naomi didn't see, she was staring ahead, her straight back barely touching the chair behind her. Marjorie sighed. She would have preferred being here with the Relief Society president or one of the women her own age, but no one else had been able to come. Naomi was one of the ones you could count on to volunteer for things, but there was something about her, a seriousness, that was unnerving. She had moved into the congregation a few years ago when her husband took a position teaching history at the secondary school. Naomi had been working on a Master's degree in archaeology or anthropology, something like that, when she married at 27 - rather later than most of the young women in the church. Two children had come quickly after the wedding and she'd given up her studies. Marjorie tried smiling again, but Naomi was miles away, her pale face unreadable. She was probably just nervous. Young people always were when it came to this kind of thing. Besides, Naomi didn't know about what was in the plastic carrier bag Marjorie held tenderly in her lap. She didn't know that death wasn't scary, it was just like walking into another room where the Heavenly Father would be waiting for you.

Marjorie shifted to the edge of her seat, clasping her bag. Marjorie had invited her neighbour Ena to church for nearly 20 years and then, one day, like a miracle, Ena was ready for the gospel. And Marjorie had been there for her. She had been there to remind Ena that she shouldn't drink coffee and couldn't go to the pub. She had taken her to Relief Society and the Scrapbooking Club. They sat together during lessons and in Sacrament meeting, Ena bright as a penny and smiling, seeming so happy to be gathered into the fold. In private moments, when Ena's lip would tremble with doubt and her thick black mascara would leave traces down her cheeks, Marjorie would be there to remind her to let go of the past, that all she needed was to be dipped under the cleansing waters of the baptismal font. Then Ena's dark past with men, her pain over her lost son would slip away, the sparkling rivulets spilling down her forehead and dark hair, washing her clean.

When the day of her baptism finally came, Ena looked tiny and nervous when Elder Smith cradled her in his arms and lowered her like a small child

under the water, taking care that she was immersed completely. She had laughed out loud when she came up, her makeup running and the wet white jumpsuit clinging to her delicate shoulder blades and wrapping around her legs as she walked up the stairs from the font to the changing room.

They never discussed it, but Marjorie had been sure that Ena was on the road to the temple, to their highest form of worship. Marjorie had pictured driving Ena through the three hours of hectic London traffic to get to the temple, Marjorie's husband Burt in tow, wheezing in the back seat. She pictured arriving, welcomed by the lush green lawns in the garden, the little pond, the glint of gold on top of the majestic marble spire, Moroni and his trumpet rising and rising into the sun. She could see the cool pale walls in the hushed corridors, the elderly women and men dressed all in white, padding silently along the plush carpeting and directing them with soft smiles. Marjorie so loved the temple, she had known from the start that it was her duty to bring Ena there. But she was patient, she'd known that Ena needed more lessons and repentance before she would be ready.

For months, Ena rarely missed a church meeting or an appointment with the missionaries. Ena lived alone. The men in her life, none of them any good, were all gone. Her son had died young and her daughter and grandchildren lived in another village. The missionary rules meant that the young elders couldn't be alone with Ena, so Marjorie and Burt always came along to supervise the lessons. Marjorie thought that was a good thing. Men and women who weren't married shouldn't be alone together. It didn't matter that Ena was in her 50s and the boys were only 19 - anything could happen in this world. The five of them would sit in Ena's tiny sitting room, Ena and the long-legged missionaries on dining room chairs and Burt and Marjorie on the settee next to a wooden curio cabinet filled with a collection of little painted porcelain shoes. On top of the cabinet were photos from Ena's Nile cruises. Ena had been on the River Nile cruise six times. She told anyone that would listen that the happiest times of her life were spent there. What exactly she loved about it, she couldn't say. There were some happy memories, being there with lovers and her son, Tom, before he died. But it was really the river itself, the mystery of the heavy, dark water moving beneath the ship that filled her with wonder. She always went in November, during the ancient season of Peret, when the floods subsided, leaving the fertile silt that promised life for another year.

During the missionary lessons, Burt sat uncomfortably on the couch, his huge stomach blooming between his knees and pulling his trousers tight to expose his thick white socks. Sometimes Burt would push his glasses back on his nose and give a lengthy clarification on a point of doctrine. More often he would lean back into the couch, as much as his size would allow, clasp his hands together as if in prayer or deep meditation, and drift off to sleep. Marjorie sat keenly on the edge of the couch, her long swirly skirts hanging over sturdy black shoes. She never wore makeup and her bob framed her broad pink face in a way that made her seem like a large grey-



haired schoolgirl. The elders were mostly good boys, but Marjorie worried that Ena was too taken with them, these confident, sociable boys from Utah and Idaho. She had seen it before, investigators became attached to the elders that taught and baptized them and sometimes floundered or fell away when the boys were transferred to another area in the mission. Sometimes baptisms just didn't take.

Still, it all seemed to be going well and then Ena started cancelling appointments and missing church. She would say she had been called into work, or her daughter was visiting, or she wasn't feeling well. A few times, she just didn't show. Marjorie and Burt found themselves on the doorstep with two blonde elders, staring at each other awkwardly. Looking back, Marjorie was ashamed that her faith had faltered. She worried that Ena was weak, maybe shamed by an unrepented sin. Maybe she had never given up tea or coffee. Marjorie never admitted it to Burt, the Relief Society president, the elders, or her visiting teaching supervisor, but she poured her heart out to her Heavenly Father in her prayers, asking over and over - what is to be done about Ena? How could she keep her from losing her way?

The receptionist finally finished her phone call and gave Marjorie and Naomi a conciliatory smile. 'Thank you for waiting, I'll just go and make sure they are ready for you and then you can go through to see her,' she said, her manner professional and smooth, used to gently manoeuvring human beings stunned by grief.

Marjorie was one of the first people to know Ena was ill. Ena hadn't called, but Marjorie had never stopped checking on her. Unwell throughout the winter, Ena had been told she had the flu twice before she finally saw a doctor who sent her to the hospital for tests. But it was too late. At first, there was talk of treatment, plans for chemo and radiation, but within weeks, the prognosis had changed. The cancer was too fast, too aggressive.

The congregation rallied around Ena. Marjorie and the Relief Society president arranged for weekly visitors, meals brought in and blessings from the elders and bishop. The two women were there when the NHS delivered the hospital bed to save Ena from having to climb the stairs in her little house. Marjorie pushed the settee all the way against the wall and moved the curio cabinet so that Ena could see her little shoes from the bed, but she moved the cruise pictures, thinking it best to keep Ena from dwelling on her days on the ship watching the water swirl beneath her. Marjorie was there almost every day consulting with the nurse, trying to get Ena to eat a little something or pray with her. Ena was always too tired, unwilling to say the prayers. Marjorie prayed for them. She asked for healing or, if healing wasn't possible, strength to bear their burdens.

'Thank you,' Ena would whisper through lips that had grown thin and cracked. She constantly asked for water now.

The receptionist returned and showed them into a large white room. There was a sink in one corner and worktops running along the walls, housing jars and various medical implements. A recently abandoned coffee

cup was resting near a jar of cotton wool. The room smelt strongly of bleach, but also something else, the faint mossy smell of decay. A row of humming fluorescent lights was softened by sunlight streaming through a row of small square windows near the ceiling.

In the middle of the room was a stainless steel examination table. Ena was lying naked on the table with a white sheet draped over the lower half of her body. Always a small woman, she was tiny now, the size of a child. Ena's dark hair was wild, silver at the roots. Her small exposed breasts were completely flat, her rib cage prominent beneath her skin. Her skin no longer looked like skin. It was an unearthly blue white and strangely smooth and taut, rigid around the mouth leaving her with an expression somewhere between a grimace and a smile. Ena, but not Ena.

'Normally, the undertaker handles the dressing of the body, but I understand that, for religious reasons, you will be doing it. Ms Williams' family does not want to see the body and no viewing has been arranged, but they've brought a bag that Ms Williams packed,' the receptionist gestured to a bag sitting on a chair beside the table. 'They've also sent along her makeup, some clothes and hair things – everything you should need. They sent some new underwear, but it might be difficult to get those on,' she carefully moved the sheet to the side to show that Ena was wearing something that looked like an adult diaper. 'She was so ill before she died and this is quite common, I wouldn't try to remove it and I would take care when dressing her.' She replaced the sheet.

'Thank you, we'll be fine,' Marjorie said in a tone she hoped was both authoritative and circumspect.

'Very good. Well, I'll be just outside if you have any questions or need any help. Please take as long as you need.'

When the receptionist left the room, Marjorie smiled and turned to Naomi who was still hovering near the door. Marjorie placed her bag on top of the bag from the family and briefly touched Ena's head. Then she pulled a portable CD player out of her bag.

'I've brought some things to bring the spirit to the room. This is nothing to be afraid of,' Marjorie said firmly. 'Here, plug this in over there.'

Naomi took the handle of the dusty old player and plugged it in to the wall and Marjorie handed her a CD of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir singing hymns. After a minute, the hushed, liquid sound of the famous choir emerged from the speakers, strange sounding in the sterile whiteness of the room. Naomi walked over to Ena's bag and pulled out a plastic brush with a black velvet scrunchie wrapped around the handle. There were new nylons and a black lace bra and panty set with the price tags still attached. There was one of Ena's favourite church outfits, a trim black pencil skirt and a flowery blouse in shades of fuchsia and purple. There was blush and lipstick. Ena was always made up, her little mouth bright pink, her eyes framed with black mascara and sparkly purple eye shadow. Naomi picked everything up and put it down again. 'Should we start with her hair or makeup?' she asked.

Marjorie looked at the door and then back at Naomi. 'We aren't going to bother with any of that. I have something special. Besides, the casket won't be open.'

Naomi stood there, stubbornly holding the little plastic brush and looking down at Ena. 'I know no one else is going to see her, but,' she hesitated, choosing her words carefully, 'but Ena always made an effort, she always wore makeup.'

'We aren't going to bother with any of that,' Marjorie repeated, more sternly. 'None of that matters where she is going. I have something special to show you.'

The idea had come to Marjorie in the middle of the night. She didn't sleep very well these days and it was never easy to settle with Burt snoring loudly beside her. She had said her prayers and was lying in bed, thinking about how sad it was that Ena had never been able to get to the temple and wouldn't be buried in her white temple clothes. And then it came to her with the clarity of finding snowdrops springing up in little pockets of green grass before the winter thaws. Ena needed a white dress.

Marjorie went looking for the next two days. She trudged from shop to shop in her sturdy black shoes, but it was almost impossible to find anything with sleeves, let alone something white, but then, like a message from the Heavenly Father, she'd found one. Marjorie trembled as she pulled the dress out of the bag. She was anxious to cover Ena's frozen naked body with the pure white cloth. The dress was made out of several layers of soft gauzy cotton and the bodice was covered with a loose layer of crocheted white lace that hung over the skirt, like filigree.

'I brought Ena a dress,' Marjorie said, her eyes bright and shining. 'She couldn't wear a temple dress, she hadn't gotten to the temple yet, but I found this for her. And, look, I brought her temple slippers. I don't think there is any harm in that.' Marjorie pulled a pair of white slippers edged in white lace out of her bag, the kind you could buy at the church distribution centre, and held them up triumphantly.

Naomi was still standing beside Ena with the brush in her hand. She walked forward uncertainly and touched the soft cotton of the dress, running her hands across the circular patterns of the lace. 'It's beautiful, but,' she paused, looking back at Ena, 'but what about her clothes? Does her family know about the dress?'

Marjorie was confused. 'No, but they aren't members of the church. They don't understand. They don't know how important it was to Ena.'

'But,' Naomi persisted, 'what will you do with Ena's clothes, the things that belonged to her?'

'They're just clothes...'

'But they're her clothes, her makeup, she packed the bag...'

'I won't upset them, I'll take the bag to the charity shop when we're finished here and give them away. The casket will be closed, they'll never know.'

Naomi looked alarmed. 'I'm not sure we should, Ena hadn't been to the temple yet, are you sure that she wanted to go?'

'Of course she wanted to go!' Marjorie felt hot, panicked tears filling her eyes. She couldn't understand why Naomi couldn't see what needed to be done. 'This is what Ena would have wanted! I know that this is what she would have wanted! The family won't understand, but we understand. We understand.' She was almost yelling.

But Naomi just stood there, looking uncertain. Marjorie pushed past her impatiently and stood at the head of the table, her body electric with rage. She gathered the skirt of the white dress and tried to pull it over Ena's head, but Ena's body was cold and entirely uncompromising, nothing yielding or fluid was left in her limbs. She needed all of her strength to lift Ena's head off the table and had to keep one arm under for leverage while she pulled the dress over her head with the other hand. Working slowly and awkwardly, Marjorie lifted Ena's shoulders and then her stiff arms and torso, inching the delicate white fabric around her heavy body little by little. When the dress was pulled down around her ankles, she carefully pulled silky white knee socks over each one of Ena's wasted, leaden legs and placed a soft white slipper on each foot. When she finished she looked up, flushed and defiant.

Naomi walked to the table and stood at Ena's feet for a moment and then turned off the music and unplugged the player while Marjorie collected up the bag of Ena's clothes. Marjorie walked to the head of the bed, whispered a blessing in Ena's ear and placed a soft, furtive kiss on her forehead. And then they left her lying on the table in the glowing white dress.

# A Fir Farewell

*Angela McPherson*

Long before we came to share this space  
your roots established a hold  
that sustained the weight of your presence

Casting light and shade  
you stood resolute through the seasons  
presiding over the tending, nurturing and shared joy  
that occupied and sustained our lives

Now – stormy winds and rain have joined  
to soften the earth  
that nourished your roots

Now – your dying branches lean towards the earth  
pushing into the soil  
and half-burying  
an old decorative chimney and garden table  
that slowed your fall to earth  
perhaps in solidarity, or  
in remembrance of shared family communion  
around and beneath your branches

Your roots  
ripping through carefully cultivated lawn  
reach to the sky in disarray  
their pain at being torn from the earth  
Stark

Birds flit and call in branches  
where evergreen needles cling  
but rust-brown needles at your core  
turn thoughts to the grain, colour and usefulness of your wood  
if the heart of your root stock  
is to be preserved through a carpenter's skills

Your sensible life may yet yield sensible grains  
to be turned on a lathe

Otherwise you will be hewn and cleft  
then taken away to rot or burn  
while another will be planted

In your place  
In remembrance

# Ten Days of Holocaust

## *Deborah Landes*

When I was seventeen, I went on a European Tour, a sort of rite of passage with other Jewish teenagers – not as big or as important as the month-long trip to Israel but still ten days of European Jewry, a global Diaspora. And sure, there were happy moments of the tour, like waking up every single day to ‘She Moves In Her Own Way’ by the Kooks, or singing in a Friday Night Service at my Granny’s old synagogue in Berlin and knowing all the tunes, because Hebrew really is a global language. Or falling off a bike in Berlin because I couldn’t reach the ground, or going on the ferry home in my pyjamas because I just couldn’t be bothered to change after the overnight journey. And sure, I took happy things away with me, like the green shoes from Prague that I still have now, but my abiding memory of that trip is not the Happy, but of the endless line of Holocaust.

Every day was a museum or a prayer service on that theme and by the time we got to Germany, to Berlin, we were completely inured to it. The massive memorial meant nothing to us, and maybe it was because it didn’t feel like a memorial. Not like the river near Theresienstadt, where there were no bodies or graves, just an absence. And not like Theresienstadt itself, which was becoming a Ghetto again. And definitely not like the train tracks which ran parallel to a working line, just out of sight, behind a row of bushes, next to a pub. And it led nowhere now and led nowhere then and isn’t that the point?

And maybe it was disrespectful to play hide and seek amongst the great blocks of the Berlin Memorial but not when...

I can’t remember the names.

In Theresienstadt, I remember putting a stone on every grave I came across, because that’s what you do in Judaism to remember the dead. I can’t remember the names but I can remember putting stones on the names and maybe that’s enough. But I doubt it.

We were given one job on this tour. Choose a name and remember it. But it was too big and too many and I couldn’t remember it even an hour later.

What I do remember is sitting by the river with the absence, and on the train tracks out of sight, and lighting candles with fourteen people my age. And each of us sat there in broad daylight and an elderly couple, probably not Jewish joined us. And we sat there and we said:

“Yit’gadal V’Yitkadash sh’mei raba – May his great name be exalted and sanctified.”

## Yú Xuánjī poems

*Translated from the traditional Mandarin Chinese by Simon Everett & Lin Su*

These two translations of the Chinese T'ang Dynasty poet, Yú Xuánjī, are rendered in a free-form style, contrary to that of the Mandarin's 'regulated verse'. Our approach has been 'sense-for-sense', attempting to bring to the fore Yú's self-referential imagery of longing and desire.

The translations are accompanied by 'Out Set' poems – poems that came out of the process of translating these poems – and provide a focal point that hinges the poetry between 9th Century China and present day.



## Poem for the Riverbank Willow

赋得江边柳  
翠色连荒岸，烟姿入远楼。影铺秋水面，花落钓人头。  
根老藏鱼窟，枝低系客舟。萧萧风雨夜，惊梦复添愁。

The jade green  
connects  
these barren banks

and fog blends countless  
silhouettes  
into the pallor  
of far-off buildings

as reflections unfold  
on the autumn-water-surface.

Flowers fall on fishermen's  
heads to say  
I'm here just

by these old roots  
and hidden fish-dens

and branches that lower,  
tie and drag along  
the boats of passing  
guests.

Cold, windy  
desolate  
night  
laced with rain

I am  
startled  
by nightmares

that just  
increase this

gloom.

## Poem for the Riverbank Willow (Out Set)

More understated  
row back the rhetoric

(paraphrase)  
Marianne Moore

“the deepest feeling  
always  
shows itself in silence  
not in silence but in

restraint”

regarding the fishermen  
kept? as fisher/men  
un/broken

[im]permanent  
human mortality

self  
referential                      always

-- & by extension  
The Natural World

a means of conveying  
Stay! Don't go!

## To a Master Alchemist

寄题炼师

霞彩剪为衣，添香出绣帟。芙蓉花叶□，山水帔□稀。  
驻履闻莺语，开笼放鹤飞。高堂春睡觉，暮雨正霏霏。

Her robe is  
cut  
from the rose  
illuminations  
of the morning  
sun-clouds  
and incense  
that curls  
from the burner.

She rises from  
her draperies  
to wear the hibiscus  
crowned gown

patterned  
by mountains  
and the running  
water  
below.

Birdsong  
is her only interlude

a release

as the freed crane  
flies  
from its cage -

but sleeping  
in the high  
ceiling hall  
this spring

the rain  
at dusk for her  
falls  
heavily.



# Baba Yaga and the first dream of owls

*Carole Webster*

When the owls flew out of the kitchen dresser  
Baba Yaga saw the pure lines of their passing  
From between the spidery teapot shelves

She tied her bat soft boots and partly covered her head  
With the black woollen shawl patterned in  
Cherub pink roses so she was changed a little

Because she had become a dream  
She walked long steps  
Through the bluebell woods to the river path

She was swift moving along the flow  
Of water to Whitehouse beach and  
The moon was half there to see by

The owls blossomed  
In the lightening tree  
The moon became their golden eyes

And Baba Yaga knew the amber of their seeing  
Becoming precise white feathers  
Mouse hunting.

*12th March, 2014*

# Picking the bones

*Ellyn Coe*

So take from me the favoured rib and grasp it in your fleshed hand  
To play upon its cage like a xylophone  
Or make of it another woman desirable to your demands  
A lover made from bone.

Replace my picture on the nightstand  
Her face can guard your timepiece and colognes  
A skeletal smile you have built to never waver and,  
Of course, to never weep or moan.

Parade her on the grandest grandstand  
Place her upon a golden throne  
Sound the fanfare from your gilded bandstand  
Trumpets, drum roll and trombone.

Leave me to live in the shadowlands  
I'll wander the landscape, quite alone  
And wonder too, wearing my black armband  
Though I am a woman on my own, I am a woman who is her own.

# The last time I saw you cry

*James Jarrett*

They were like any other father and daughter, except he was a male single parent. And she was dying.

He remembered the days before her collapse. At first, he had been worried by her pale appearance, and her lack of spark. On his return from work, he would call out his customary, “ELLO, ELLO!” in a mock French accent, acknowledge he was competing with the pop-chart racket from her CD player, and would head for the kitchen to make a cup of tea in his favourite mug, embossed proudly with the word ‘DAD’. After a while she would come downstairs and there would be a fleeting hug, and a cheeky nibble of whatever was left of his biscuit, and a spot of conversation, which usually consisted of him attempting to extract information about who she was seeing at the weekend. She always did her best to evade his questions, but he liked to think of himself as a pretty tough interrogator and wouldn’t take “no-one dad” for an answer. In truth, he was shocked by just how grown-up she’d become. Suddenly, (and it seemed to him as if it had happened overnight) his little girl had vanished and been replaced by a young woman: complete with make-up and a bolshie attitude that he felt didn’t really suit her.

But then came the day he had returned to a house that seemed strangely lifeless. He called out, but there was no reply, not even one of her by now familiar ripostes. He found her in bed, asleep. Her skin was clammy to the touch. She slept late, and only with great reluctance admitted she was finding school totally exhausting and that she could barely manage to get through the day. Shortly after this admission, she collapsed at a slumber party, held at her best friend’s house. It was a Saturday night, and he was at home, watching a film and drinking a glass of wine, when he’d received the phone-call. It was her friend’s mum who had rushed them to the hospital.

There had been a long wait and he had plenty of time to study a painting of a large octopus on the wall opposite. It had a smiley face and its tentacles stretched the length of the wall. The consultant had spoken to him alone. The results revealed his daughter had leukaemia and treatment was to begin immediately.

She seemed to respond well to the first phase of treatment, but it took its toll. She was still very weak, and her hair fell out. He busied himself shuttling between home and bedside, bringing her fluffy pink slippers and the mountains of cards, balloons, and get well gifts and trinkets from her friends. The cards sang and made funny noises and the drawings inside all wore smiley expressions, rather like that on the octopus. But when he drove home each night, the image in his head was that of his daughter, supposedly with her entire life ahead of her, but instead marooned inside a stack of get-well kitsch. When her friends visited, she rallied herself to listen to their

excitable talk of boys and the winner of the latest reality pop show, and who they fancied, and who they were going on dates with. But it was evident that something was still very wrong. She remained listless, and continued to lose weight. She bruised far too easily, and her gums bled at the mere touch of her toothbrush.

He could only stand by and watch, hold her hand and try to reassure her as best he could. But the consultant had made it clear that this course of treatment was their only option. One night, as he kept vigil beside her bed, he had doubled over, his stomach contracting in sharp convulsions. He gave way to the pain and began crying. When looked up again, he was startled to find his daughter wide awake. Her expression was one of horror. He knew what she must be thinking: if even dad believes I'm going to die then what hope have I got? He tried to reassure her that he was just tired and irrational, but he feared she was not convinced. He steeled himself to do better. It was the last time she saw him cry.

She had been scheduled to receive further tests, but when the consultant saw how much her condition had deteriorated he immediately advised against it. She was far too sick. "She has to stay comfortable now," he whispered. So the week before Christmas, he had taken her home. A cluster of trees stood outside the house over the road, wrapped in strings of fairy lights, which lit up the whole street when dusk fell. But he couldn't even leave the house to buy presents. He lived a twilight existence, moving softly about in the shadows. His greatest fear was that she might die alone. He stayed at her bedside: often nodding-off in exhaustion in the early hours, before jolting awake to hear her groaning in pain some time later.

Then, realising that she could hear him, he would try and soothe her by re-telling some of the bedtime stories she so loved as a tiny girl: stories about magic lands in faraway kingdoms that could be visited on fluffy clouds, journeys lit up by pearl moons. He would speak of fairies, and angels, and castles that slipped through ethereal mists, and of mysterious lakes, their dark depths concealing kingdoms populated by wonderful marine creatures which kept guard over ocean treasure hidden by an ancient aqua people in the labyrinthine chambers of the seabed. They were just silly ideas that popped into his head, but she loved them. Her favourite story told of a Venetian merchant called Alfonso who lived at the time of the Renaissance. This was a story he was to tell many times, and he came to know it by heart.

"Alfonso was a gold merchant who one day decided to set sail to discover a new world and new treasures in far-off lands. He sailed alone, and at first, met with little resistance from the gentle seas which his boat sliced through with ease. But on the third day, his ship was hit by a great storm, and Alfonso barely escaped with his life as he was tossed and battered about by the huge waves and torrential rain. The storm over, Alfonso found himself lost. His compass was broken, so he realised his only chance of rescue was to use the constellations in the night sky to assist him in finding land and safety.



“So this is what he did: night after night he sat on deck, with his wooden rosary clenched in one hand, and his other tracing the outlines of The Bear, and Aquarius the water carrier, and all the other signs of the ancient Babylonian Zodiac; all of them stitched into the dark blanket of sky. His attention was caught by Orion in the south-eastern sky. The warrior of the constellations, he wore a knife in his belt, and brandished a bow and club to repel the fatal sting of the menacing Scorpio nearby. Staring up at the heavens, he watched in amazement as a cascade of stars fell to earth, one after another, flecks of light scattered by Orion’s club. Then he found the Plough, with its three-pronged trident guiding him towards Polaris, the North. Following its course, he knew he could navigate his way by night. By day, he charted the sun as it was born to the east. After the sun set, the ocean spray cooled his blistered skin as he laboured on deck. Eventually, he spotted land on the horizon. Surely, he had found the new world at last!

“Stepping on to dry land, he was exhausted, and his damaged skin spoke of the great tribulations of his journey. He was soon discovered by the indigenous peoples who took him into their care. These dark-haired men and women lived in encampments by the river. They marked their bodies with strange painted symbols and wore a myriad of skins, taken from the animals that inhabited their lands. Their leaders stood out for the fantastic head dresses they wore, made up of clusters of brightly coloured feathers. Days passed and, after receiving much tender care from these people, Alfonso began to feel stronger. As the months passed, a strange sense of peace settled upon him in their company. He felt a genuine wonder as he worked alongside the men, hunting and fishing, and tracking through ancient redwood forests.

“He was a mercenary European, who had come to plunder their land, but he had been made welcome and cared for and, in time, he began to adapt to their ways. He became fluent in their language, and he was fascinated by their rituals and their sacred communions, which often began with ecstatic worship of a sacrificed animal. And these gatherings weren’t like anything he had ever experienced before. The shaman and the tribal elders would appear to transcend the mortal realm by whipping themselves into an ecstatic frenzy and reciting incantations. They were transformed; the gods of the land, sea and air spoke to them in tongues. This people had great respect for the animals they hunted in the forests and for the land they called home. They saw themselves as children of their mother, the earth. And they believed that if they displeased their gods they would be punished by the spirits that inhabited the wood, so they built great shrines and totems dedicated to the worship of their idols.

“Eventually, Alfonso lost sight completely of the original purpose of his expedition. He no longer dreamed of acquiring huge fortunes. He no longer saw himself as a wealthy gentleman cavorting about the town, or reposing in luxury at one of his many homes. In fact, he began to feel a sense of detachment from the life he once had on the other side of the world. He felt a deep affinity with this new world, and found it difficult to imagine ever leaving.

“But after many years, Alfonso did return. He endured that same voyage, and again, he survived by a hair’s breadth. But he was a changed man. He no longer dreamed of wealth; he had learned to appreciate what he had, and the value of peace itself. He could not settle with his wife, and he found himself irrevocably at odds with his old life as a gold merchant. He was ready to seek out a different kind of fortune. And so he departed, once again on his little boat, off into the sunset, looking for more adventures...’

“And tomorrow night I’ll tell you what happened to him on his next voyage into the unknown.”

He leant over to kiss her forehead, and tuck her in. Then he turned out the light for the last time.

# Rapunzel

*Elaine Ewart*

You can see from the photo,  
How she'd stand out in a crowd.  
He never let her cut it.  
When she was little,  
The state she'd come in for her tea!  
For hours I'd brush out tangles,  
Twigs and leaves, her red-eyed,  
Yowling head jerking up  
Like a wolf's, scabby knees  
Dancing up and down.

He never saw that.  
She would sit on his lap,  
Pouting and squirming,  
Throwing back a curtain of stars,  
A streaming milky way,  
With a toss of her head.

At fifteen, she tried to dye it –  
Oh my. You should have been there:  
The shouting, when her dad  
Came home; the scarlet streaks  
In the bathtub; her screams as  
She tripped on the stairs, falling out  
Of her towel, pulled by  
Her dripping, musky fox tail.

Boyfriends? Well, she dated, but  
No-one serious. My husband  
Interviewed them on the doorstep. You can't be  
Too careful. They never lasted long.  
I think some girls are just  
Too pretty, you know? Intimidating.

You're so patient. I'd offer you tea, but  
The water's off. The plumber's late. It's the  
Hair, he told us last week. The drains  
Are blocked, overgrown with dank,  
Viscous fronds. A nice young man; he seemed  
So reliable... I'm sorry. Where was I?

Yes. Two days ago. And we've heard  
Nothing from her. Speak to my husband?  
Of course. He's due back from work any  
Moment now. What is the time? As late  
As that? I'm sure he said... Let me  
Just phone him. Please  
Just wait there. Wait.

# The Mere-Dragoun

## *Helen Chambers*

All was not well in a little village not so very far away from here (but I won't tell you quite where). For many months, a chilling cry had sent the villagers scurrying for cover: 'Dragoun! Dragoun in the Mere!'

This dragoun, or water-worm, was said to be enormous, although few of the villagers had spied it; nevertheless, not one doubted its existence. No-one knew where it had come from, or when it had appeared. Simply this: one day, it was not there, and the next, it was. Twice the length of a cow, said those who claimed a passing acquaintance with it. Its long snout was packed with pointed teeth. It had an extended, green-brown body, coloured the same as the tree trunks and willow fronds encircling the Mere. Some said it could be mistaken for a log, lying prone just beneath the surface of the murky water. Others told of the spikes along its back and spiny tail, unclear where body ended and tail began. Its bulbous eyes sat atop its head, each like a bubble in the water, able to see in all directions at once. When it appeared, the water around it would effervesce and boil. Then, powered by its long tail, it would swim through the water and crawl onto the land, with its strange stunted limbs ending in clawed feet.

Once on land, its fearfulness multiplied. The creature could open its jaws wide enough to fit around the torso of a man. It could entrap and severely wound its unfortunate victim by snapping them shut hard together, then dragging its prey to the centre of the Mere, where it would roll under the water. It was helped in this endeavour by its long tail. The victim, man or beast, would be held beneath the water until their lungs filled with water and they lost the will to fight. The dragoun would disappear, presumably down into the belly of Hell, whence the deep Mere had long been known to lead.

On one occasion the creature had been spotted asleep, half-beached on the muddy bank at the water's edge. A group of youths dared one another to approach. They saw one jagged white tooth visible on each side of its snout. As they edged closer, they said it grinned a grotesque smile at them. Then it was seen to open an eye and wink, as if in complicity at some joke. They backed away in fear for their lives and loosed a volley of arrows at its scaly hide. To their horror, these glanced off without penetrating its skin or causing it the slightest discomfort, and were lost to the Mere. The boys added accounts of torrents of fire issuing in great cascades from its mouth. No one dared visit the Mere to ascertain if this was bravado or truth.

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Adam, the forester, and his youngest daughter Matilda, were amongst the most alarmed, as Adam's work in the forest constantly brought him to the banks of the Mere. Indeed, their little cottage lay within a few moments'

walk of the water. They were not a wealthy family; yet, due to their diligence in work and their sunny natures, they had been most content prior to this disturbance. Adam, Matilda and the other villagers waited to see what should be done about the monster. Of course, everyone was in agreement that something should be done, but no-one knew what. Only when a large number of cattle had strayed too close and disappeared as described, did the priest take charge.

The priest, a round-headed man with bulging, yellow eyes, summoned the village elders to a meeting. The elders argued long and hard, and late into the night, but no one could provide a solution. The dragoon had snatched valuable cattle, and indeed any other creature foolish enough to wander too close to the water. Not one man was prepared to fight with the creature; not even a band of them joined together. Most hoped that, in the same way it had one day appeared, it would one day disappear.

Seeing that nothing would be done otherwise, the priest decreed that the dragoon had been sent by God as a punishment to the villagers for their wicked ways. There was some considerable resistance to this pronouncement. Many of the elders did not appreciate this reflection on their behaviour. So, as he talked on, and on, later and later into the night, they were reluctantly reminded of unkindnesses and grudges against one another. Little slights became magnified and they came to recognise each other's sins in the lurid pictures that he painted. Long-forgotten petty crimes and vendettas resurfaced and feuds were duly magnified and distorted, in the same way a stick viewed standing upright in water is perceived to be angled in a different direction from reality.

The corpulent priest exhorted them to work together to rid the village of its curse. The only way to appease God, he reasoned, was to sacrifice village virgins to the creature. Then the village would be saved. There was a horrified silence. None of the elders had daughters young enough to fit this description, but those with grand-daughters were greatly afeared. The priest had no children. Agreement with this idea took yet more hours of slippery persuasion.

Next morning, Adam was bidden to the priest's house, along with six other daughters of marriageable age. Before the priest and the elders, each man was forced to reach into a sack filled with local grey stones and one red sandstone from foreign parts. The unlucky man who pulled out the red-coloured stone was to prepare his daughter for sacrifice that very night.

Adam shook when he saw the red stone in his grasp. His blood ran cold in his veins, and yet sweat beaded his brow. He protested violently, but the priest ordered him to be detained until after the event, and he was led away to a cell. There he sat, clutching his unlucky red stone. All those careful years bringing up Matilda with love and good sense after the death of her mother had led inexorably to this blackest of moments, where he was unable to protect her in the way a father should. What a waste of young life. Adam submerged himself in dark thoughts of taking his own.

The priest, meanwhile, made clear he would perform no further wedding ceremonies until such time as the beast had been expunged from the village, as bargaining for the hand in marriage of two of the girls had already begun in earnest, with promised dowries reaching unaccustomed levels of generosity. All those present were sworn to secrecy. Yet as is the custom in these small communities, every detail was known to all householders, including the unfortunate Matilda, by midday.

When, shortly afterwards, two of the virgins were caught trying to dispose of their troublesome virginity (there being no lack of male offers to help) to avoid inclusion in the next draw, the priest intervened and brought all the girls to his house for their own safety. He advised them to pray together silently for God's deliverance, for he disliked their chatter. He would withdraw to his private quarters to do the same for them.

Incarcerated in a stuffy room, the seven frightened girls prayed silently as bidden. This lasted for a few heartbeats after which they began to comfort Matilda, for she was that evening's unlucky sacrificial virgin. Eventually, their voices rose into a condemnation of the priest's decision. They began to discuss how to prevent the sacrifice happening in the first place. Finding the priest asleep and the outer door easy to force, they hurried off around the village in search of equipment and support, and reconvened in good time so that the priest did not discover their absence.

He re-appeared sometime later, yawning. Matilda requested a final meal for them all to enjoy before her sacrifice, and he assented. He sat at the table with them, enjoying the good food and oblivious to the repeated refilling of his wine goblet. The sacrifice was ordained to take place at sunset, and the priest, by now rather woolly-headed, had to be reminded by the girls of his purpose. Matilda assured him there was no need to tie her hands; she was accepting of the necessity of the imminent event and would not attempt to flee.

Prior to sundown, an unexpectedly buoyant sacrificial party set off through the forest, headed to the Mere. Matilda led the way, head held high despite her trembling heart. The rotund priest followed, supported on either side by a girl, and followed by the remaining maidens. The other villagers crept along a little way behind them; not sure whether their presence was permitted, but equally determined not to miss the promised spectacle, so long as there was no danger to themselves.

When they arrived, they found the Mere in solemn mood, staring heavenwards with unblinking eye. Not a wrinkle disfigured its mirrored surface. There was not a breath of air to ruffle it. At a safe distance, the villagers lined the banks to better watch the spectacle. Adam (now released from his cell, but held firm by two men) was amongst their number, quaking at the proceedings. The priest waved them back from the edge, and they melted into the trees and stood gossiping in whispers, well away from the beach where the priest and girls stood.

The girls' hair was loosened and flowed down their backs in waves, and their plain linen shifts glowed gold in the soft evening light.

Before long, two distinct bubbles rose in the centre of the Mere. They blinked slowly, revealed themselves blood-red, and swivelled, observing everything. A distinct in-breath could be heard, and a shudder rippled through the onlookers. The water around the dragoun began to bubble and boil. The priest loosened his grip on the girls and took a few uncertain steps backwards. Matilda took a deep breath and stepped bravely forward onto the beach, presenting herself to the monster. As if in response, the dragoun's tail swished rapidly to each side, propelling it speedily through the water and towards her. Adam cried out in horror.

As its front limbs lumbered onto the beach, its salivating maw widened in preparation to strike. Matilda stepped back. She grabbed a hemp-spun rope from a friend and swung and twisted it, leading the other maidens in this activity, until the beast's jaw was forced and squeezed shut in several nooses. The dragoun whipped its mighty tail around, catching the priest's ankles. Unbalanced, he wobbled. A youth stepped up and gave him a heartfelt shove. At once he fell and rolled into the Mere in a frenzy of splashes. His cries were ignored.

The villagers rushed over to the girls' assistance. Rondels were produced and the creature's eyes were put out. Matilda's father had come prepared to observe the worst, but his under-forester, who was sweet on Matilda, had thought to bring his master's tools. Adam sawed at the creature's neck, until finally, in a mess of gristle and blood, its head was parted from its body. A cheer rose up from the villagers. Flaming brands appeared and fires were lit beside the Mere. The water flickered and danced in celebration while the villagers set to.

They feasted on the monster's meat for many days, until only a heap of bones were left. These were tossed into a pit and forgotten, to be rediscovered and puzzled over by archaeologists many centuries later. All seven girls were rewarded with purses fashioned from the soft skin of the creature's belly, and Matilda's was the largest. Not a scrap of the monster was wasted; a purpose was found for any inedible part. And the priest? Well, as he was never seen again, it was presumed he had descended to the deepest part of the Mere, and perhaps beyond, for certainly, the water-worm or dragoun has never returned. It is remembered nowadays in the stained glass of one church and on the painted plaster wall of another in this area – if you look hard enough, you may find it. But the villagers remain watchful in case the water should bubble and boil once again in the Mere.



## Back garden - Bartholomew Close - 1987

### *Oliver King*

When the grass had all been mown,  
in that summer, on that late afternoon,  
the overgrowth of half the lawn  
paraphrased and shorter shorn  
kissed and greened our running feet,  
pricking soft and unsurely sharp.

Mum and Dad remembered summer  
in photographs now losing colour:  
you and me, twinned and blurred by speed,  
ran ankle-deep in drifts of green.  
By chance they've saved us, in the between:  
what's lost keeps these frames apart.

# Hungerwinter

*Jeremy Solnick*

*'Whenever my turn comes  
to lust for the demolition of some city  
whose people may be favourites of yours,  
Do not hamper my fury!'*

*Homer, The Iliad, Book IV, trans. Robert Fitzgerald*

Before September 17th 1944  
No-one went hungry in Arnhem. The Nederrijn  
Rolled past stuffed warehouses, on the promenade  
Smart waiters served their patrons schnapps  
It was a comfortable and prosperous place  
After the battle the enemy savaged the town  
Like a pack of hyenas, they tore it apart

'Away, away but where to'  
Confusion fills the battle broken city  
The Obersturmführer orders evacuation  
But what has he ordered and who must go?  
The leaders have gone into hiding or fled  
Old men of dubious worth try appeasement  
The resistance 'dive' into deep hiding places

Douwenga jerks awake to the sound of feet  
Furtively he pulls aside a ragged curtain  
Shadows shuffle northwards towards Apeldoorn  
Gray and bent, coats flapping in the Autumn wind  
Women, children and the old flee the city  
They wheel bicycles, push barrows or laden prams  
Crammed with belongings and food for a journey

He motions to his wife, they are prepared  
He has hidden everything precious in the cellar  
She wakes their two children  
They will go to her cousin's farm in Renkum  
It is not safe for him, he will follow after nightfall  
They hear the sound of marching feet  
Is it a patrol looking for slave labourers?

The SS and the Greens have quotas to fulfil  
The factories and mines of the Reich are hungry  
They snatch men off the street or raid the houses  
He has a hiding place in the attic no-one knows  
It is a small cavity behind a wooden beam  
Boneless as an octopus he slithers in feet first  
He lies there for an hour until the coast is clear

Five broken puppets lie in the square  
Shot, and left to rot with all the rubbish  
Someone has stolen the woman's shoes  
He sees the doctor nose to the sky  
His thick moustache still neatly combed  
The gold chain that hung on his ample belly, gone  
He skirts the perimeter keeping out of sight

The shops are dark and boarded up  
from the baker's comes a sound and light  
He knocks, perhaps they have some bread  
Frantic bustle then the door opens a crack  
His friend Jan Kok peeps out and thrusts  
A freshly printed sheet at him. The BBC news  
It's death to print it and his children must eat

He makes the family bread from tulip bulbs  
Removes the onion skin and poisonous centre  
Grinds the bulbs to meal and mixes it with salt  
Then adds water and bakes a loaf that tastes  
of wet sawdust. It is a change from boiled beet  
They amuse each other by telling tales of feasts  
Imaginary repasts an empress might enjoy

Mrs van Ost looks at the sleeping girl  
Hannah, the daughter of her friend Julia Cohen  
Too innocent to face a savage world  
She has no children of her own  
Her husband has been taken by the enemy  
She decides to stay on in her house  
She cannot abandon her charge

Douwenga is out night foraging  
They have no food and little money  
He hears of a field where a potato crop  
Was harvested. It is a two hour walk  
He scrabbles in the heavy soil for an hour  
and finds ten tubers. Food for a week  
Going home he avoids the gentle moonlight

Christmas Eve

They all sleep in one bed for warmth  
His daughter's arm juts from the blankets  
Dry and brittle as the twigs on the rose bush  
They dine on beet cakes and four black market eggs  
In the crypt of the Church lie the bodies of the starved  
All wood goes for fuel. There is none for coffins

Mrs van Ost remembers a childhood outing  
Her cousin showed her a hidden pool. 'Here'  
He said, 'you can always find a trout to guddle'  
She finds the pool an hour before dawn  
And slides her hand into the icy water  
At first light she flips out a startled fish  
And laughs and laughs just like a girl

Suddenly it is over

The enemy's hands fall from their throats  
The Canadian army storms the bridges  
Friendly tanks rumble through the streets  
Shadows emerge from the houses  
Men ghost pale from months in hiding  
Women and children gaunt as winter trees

On May morning they return

To their house on ravaged Apeldoorn street  
Douwenga stares, his wife bursts into tears  
It stands like a scarecrow after a bitter winter  
He rushes to the cellar. His hidey-hole is as he left it  
Crammed with all they held precious  
They laugh and whoop. They have survived.

His neighbour Mrs van Ost waves to him  
She leads a dark haired grass blade girl  
Who can barely walk. It is Hannah Cohen  
They carry a jacket with a yellow star on it  
Mrs van Ost cuts off the star with a knife  
Hannah pours fluid on it and strikes a match  
Whoof ! The star shrivels into black nothing

Douwenga stiffens at the sound of a jeep  
It has a large white leaf painted on it  
The jeep stops by Mrs van Ost. Canadian voices  
Burst over Douwenga like a summer storm  
Suddenly Douwenga weeps huge raindrops  
Two burly men offer Hannah a fresh orange  
They lift her, cobweb frail, high into the air

# Magpies

*Elaine Ewart*

In March, the nesters. Their proscribed skills, learnt in shimmying, scrambling boyhoods – the stretch of a bramble-scratched arm to seize the still-warm weight of perfection – now redeemed, in the name

of our need to know. They don't mind me here, sharing their lore. The hot search, the cold search, with stick, with bins, with extendible dentist's mirror. Nothing: until a magpie pair, twig-carrying,

lightening-tailed, draw us in lumbering pursuit: over fence, under wire, as their long fingers flex the sky. We pause, panting, jubilant. Our targets alight on a woven dome, crowning a high thorn tree.

Exultant with rattling chatter, the birds fetch and carry in plain view, their spread feather fans coquettish. 'You know, it's not true, that they steal.' I blush for past metaphors. With a flourish of blunt pencil stub,

a silt-nailed hand fills in the first Nest Record Card of the season. Possession is no longer the prize. We grin at the glossy, serious-beaked outlaws: between us, the sun-softened distance of spring.

# An oath tae Agnes

*Joshua Ross Grocott*

“Here’s tae all those that I love;  
 Here’s tae all those that love me.  
 And here’s tae all those that love those that I love;  
 And all those that love those that love me.”\*  
 Nan loved every one of us,  
 Though she often made a fuss  
 About the things we said or did...  
 The tricks we played or mess we hid,  
 The clothes we wore or clothes we tore,  
 The beards we grew; or when we innocently  
 Misconstrued instructions, on her shopping lists,  
 About a certain magazine –  
 Or Mr Sheen, or Windolene  
 And Germolene Antiseptic Cream –  
 And so the list goes on...  
 Forgive me if I digress now;  
 But I must also mention how our Nan would  
 Pitch a hissy fit, when mess was left  
 On any bit of kitchen surface, floor or table,  
 Or in the lounge – and, if able,  
 You always strived to clean it up post-haste;  
 Before Nan’s wrath would grace her face,  
 And she’d threaten to grab the mythic strap  
 And put you there, across her lap,  
 To administer the phantasmal thrashing.  
 But Granny never beat her grandson (me),  
 Unless the belting was so severe  
 That the memory fled away in fear –  
 And now I can’t remember...  
 Though this I doubt, with precedent;  
 Remembering every clout I took –  
 Though it were written in a book –  
 And every single thought of Gran says  
 She was not that type of woman.  
 For her, the threat was quite enough;  
 So she could do the nicer stuff  
 (Which is a grandparent’s prerogative),

And left other hands to chastise me –  
And I often deserved it (as many will agree).  
But Nan was like my surrogate Mum,  
And though she never struck my bum  
She made me what I am today –  
In many ways (for good or ill) –  
And though her passing is a bitter pill,  
I will take it as she taught me:  
With a glass of brown sugar,  
Hot water, lemon and whisky –  
A Scottish trick for keeping frisky –

“So here’s tae the heath, the hill and the heather,  
The bonnet, the plaid, the kilt and the feather.”\*  
Here’s to Agnes, who from the Maidens hailed,  
And here’s to family, who her to Essex trailed.

*\*Scottish folk proverb / drinking toast.*



# The Polish Haikus

*Elaine Ewart*

*Jubilation*

Stilt-like, stepping through  
The ripe corn; black and white storks  
Fling back snapping heads.

*Corpus Christi*

Her white hem brushes  
Rose petals; above, torches  
Smoke the scream of swifts.

*On Wielka Sowa*

Mountain heat; Two rocks  
Shelter in shade, wings outstretched,  
A speckled butterfly.

# Baba Yaga and the dream of bees: Part One

*Carole Webster*

In August  
Baba Yaga  
Sits warm and saturate  
In a patch of gold, she leans  
Against the black boarded shed.

She listens to the  
Cornishman's chickens  
At scratch  
In the sandy soil  
(Scrabble and peck, peck and scratch)

The hens settle their  
Umbered wings, they sing an  
Old crooning song  
That lyric of worms  
And yellow corn.

She idly reads  
The bee lines strung  
From grey hive to  
Scarlet Emperor flowers  
Flustered and rummaged

As the bees harvest  
Their pollen chords  
And their melody raises  
An enchanted  
Somnolent air.

Baba Yaga  
Is cast asleep  
In a waking dream  
She flies high and  
Turn-twists low then rests

On umber dust,  
She lies outstretched she wears  
That yellow dress, the bee dress  
The only one she owns  
She finds she is a bride (to bee).

## Baba Yaga and the dream of a bee wedding: Part Two

The yellow bee dress  
Holds the warmth  
Of saffron, amber and  
Paintbox ochre.

Perhaps darker  
Like the anthers of  
High altar  
Lilies.

Then a proboscis tip  
To her lips  
Uttering  
Unvoiced sweetness

And so  
The first bee flew  
To her breath  
Humming into

The shadow notch  
At the base of  
Her throat and feeling  
Has become the beat of wings

One bee  
To each eye  
And all she could see  
Was flight

But she is  
Nectar and hive heavy  
She wishes for  
Flimsy wings

A voile trailing  
To her knees, she is sheathed in  
The veiled cocoon  
Of a dream.

*(With thanks to Jayne)*

## About the Contributors

**Heidi Bernhard-Bubb** is a writer with a background in journalism. She completed a Master's degree in Creative Writing at the University of Essex in 2015. She is working on a novel and lives in Suffolk with her family.

**Helen Chambers** is an MA Creative Writing student at the University of Essex, and a teacher. In 2014 she won the Hysteria Flash Fiction Award, and has had stories shortlisted in the South Wales Writers Competition and the SaveAs Writers Bigger Picture Award. She also enjoys listening to, and writing, radio drama. Her short play, *Revolution*, was performed at the University of Essex Homecoming Weekend in 2014.  
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**Ellyn Coe** lives in Ipswich, Suffolk with her partner and two British Shorthair cats. She has a BA in Creative Writing (first class) from the University of Essex and an MA in Playwriting. She is now studying for a PhD in Theatre for Education and Social Change, focusing on addressing FGM in the UK.

**Simon Everett** is a poet currently studying for a Creative Writing PhD at the University of Essex, funded by the AHRC, after having completed his BA and MA degrees at the University of Kent. His poetry and translations have been anthologised and have appeared in magazines such as *Stand*.

**Joshua R. Grocott** completed both his BA and MA in Creative Writing at the University of Essex, and is now undertaking his PhD in the same thing at the same place. He's currently writing his second book and working as a freelance marketing consultant, copyediting when he has a spare moment, and learning how to properly master a chainsaw. [www.joshuagrocott.co.uk](http://www.joshuagrocott.co.uk)

**Oliver King** has been writing for many years and early success was as a prize-winner in the 1996 WH Smith Young Writers' Competition. After that, he studied at UEA between 1999 and 2003, and gained a BA in English Literature with a minor in Creative Writing. He has completed a Creative Writing MA at Essex University and is currently pursuing a Creative Writing PhD, also at Essex, writing a novel about a war poet. Born and raised in Colchester, he now lives there with his wife and two children.

**Deborah Landes** is currently a PhD Student at the University of Essex. She completed her Master's degree in 2014, and since then has been working on a historical novel, which aims to explore the massacres in the Rhineland at the start of the first crusade. Her research interests arose out of a desire to explore her own cultural identity within a wider historical context of exile. In the last few years Deborah has been writing stories for a small indie game company, and has made occasional contributions to *The Jewish News*. She spends her free time running drama improvisation groups, and table-top role playing games.

**Angela McPherson** is a freelance writer, poet and e-book author. Since completing her MA, she has self-published under the pen name Verity Short. *Norah and Emma* is a historical biography about Norah Dacre Fox, suffragette and General Secretary of the WSPU. Her novel, *The Alice Band*, delves into the experiences of a group of ex-pats. She is currently editing her third novel, *Belldeep Acres*, to be published shortly. She has two other ongoing projects, one a childhood memoir of growing up in Africa, the other an account of a summer spent sailing the Mediterranean from Malta to the Peloponnese.

**Ben Shillito** is a screenwriter and film producer from Essex. He has recently been writing films and poems, and smoking too much. *Rejected* was written after his scabrous satire on literary scholarship, *Jane Ossuary* was rejected by CREEL on the grounds that it was mean-spirited and borderline pornographic.

**Gabriela Silva Rivero** was born in Mexico City in 1985. She completed her MA Creative Writing in 2012 and is currently undertaking a PhD in the same subject at the University of Essex. Her short stories have appeared in *Revista Cuadrivio*, *Brother Pig*, and other online magazines. Her first novel, *Los doce sellos*, was published in Mexico City in 2010.

**Jeremy Solnick** grew up in South Africa. He emigrated to England in 1974 and spent many years practicing as a solicitor. In 2007 he retired and started a BA Honours degree at Birkbeck. He completed an MA (Creative Writing) in 2013 at Essex and is now researching and writing for his PhD. Jeremy is interested in historically based narrative poetry and myth, and tries to find ways of adapting storytelling techniques to the imaginative retelling and interpretation of contemporary events.

**Lin Su** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Literature, Film and Theatre Studies at the University of Essex. Her PhD project, fully funded by China Scholarship Council, problematizes the representation of national place and space in modernist poetry, with a specific focus on T. S. Eliot, William Carlos Williams and Marianne Moore.

**Ian Tucker** was born in Suffolk. He studied English at Roehampton, and went on to an MA in Literary Translation at Essex. Having subsequently lived in Japan, and more recently Granada, Spain, he currently lives in Wivenhoe and is nearing completion of a PhD in Creative Writing – an undertaking which has resulted in a project titled *Sunnyland*, a novel that sets out to explore the theme of “return”, disembodied or otherwise.

**Carole Webster** is a part time Creative Writing PhD student in LiFTS, writing a collection of poetry with the working title of *The Humdrum Conundrum*. The poetry is informed by an interest in the visual arts and experimentation with drawing and painting as an aid to writing through close attention and observation.

## Editors

**Elaine Ewart** is in the first year of PhD study, sponsored by a University of Essex Silberrad Scholarship. Her thesis, *Heligoland: a literary ecology*, is a creative non-fiction piece about the North Sea islands of Heligoland. In 2015 she won second prize in the New Welsh Writing Awards, and was shortlisted for the international Resurgence Ecopoetry Prize. Elaine is a practicing poet of place, having held the office of Fenland Poet Laureate in 2012. She has been commissioned to write for the Future Floodlands performance at Peterborough Green Festival 2016.

*Blog: [flightfeather.wordpress.com](http://flightfeather.wordpress.com) Twitter @EwartElaine*

**Penny Simpson** is a recipient of an AHRC/CHASE PhD studentship. Her practice-based research draws on her background as a journalist, working with organisations such as the BBC and British Council. She has an MA in the Theory and Practice of Human Rights and her publications include two novels and a collection of short stories. Her short fiction has also been anthologized by Bloomsbury, Virago and Dalkey Archive Press. In 2015 she was shortlisted for The Novella Award and the Bristol Short Story Prize.

**Marieke Sjerps** is a third year Creative Writing PhD student at the University of Essex. Her research interests include existential philosophy, mythology, science fiction, and chivalric romance. Her thesis will consist of a science fiction novel, titled *The Leap*, which draws on the works of Socrates, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. She is currently working as a graduate teaching assistant.



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# Creel<sup>2</sup>

Creel 2 is the second anthology of short stories and poems by postgraduate students from the University of Essex. The Centre for Creative Writing offers a unique approach to the practice of writing, with an emphasis on experimentation. This strong tradition of innovation has been built over many years by writers from Ted Berrigan and Michèle Roberts to Ben Okri and Marina Warner, helping to define literature as we know it today.

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